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A SHORT TOUCH

GRANDSTIRE RINGER.

BY

THE REV. JOHN S. STEWART, M.A.,

Author of "The Pilgrim."

SIXTEEN.

10 PAGETOWN CENTRE, MAYFAIR PLACE,

1871.



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A SHORT TOUCH

BY A

GRANDSIRE RINGER.

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THE REV. JOHN S. STEWART, M.A.,

Wadham Coll., Oxford.

SHIFNAL:

RICHARD LOWE, PRINTER, MARKET PLACE.

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PREFACE.

HAVING been deeply interested in bells, ringing, and ringers, ever since I could handle a bell, I have been induced to put together a few thoughts on this interesting subject.

I know that it is a peculiar task, and peculiar are the terms used by ringers. But I am induced to print this poem (!) as it has met with much approval, in manuscript, from practical ringers.

I have rather a large acquaintance with ringers,—more than has fallen to the lot of most clergymen. I have found them (almost invariably) courteous, obliging, intelligent, and, with some exceptions, sober and steady men.

J. S. S.

SHIFNAL, FEB. 1ST, 1871.

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A SHORT TOUCH.

ARE you all off?

One's gone! Go !!

I've a pretty good head, man,
For ringing of Stedman,
And, though an old stager,
Still tackle Bob Major.

I've oft given Bob Royal
A middling long trial:—

But Stedman Cinques
I really thinks,
Be too hard for the likes o' we.

But down Lunnun and Brummagem way,
At Norwich and Bristol, (they say)
They can strike 'em that true
You'd be sure that you knew

Every bell that they struck by its figure.
 In them smoky parts
 They have curious arts,
 Which I rather fear
 We can't manage down here :
 If you go up their tower
 You'll need a good scour,—
 You'll come down as black as a nigger.

At Bow Church, they tell me, in Lunnun
 The tenor weighs more than two ton an'-
 A-half with a cry so loud and stunnin',
 As tho' your ear I'd fired a gun in.
 I think I can tell you what's the way :—
 There's a "Muskett" rings at Bow, they say.

At St. Michael's, Cornhill,
 They've twelve in C,
 The best peal still,
 I'm certain they be.

George A. Muskett, a first-rate member of the Ancient Society of
 College Youths.

The tenor they state
 's forty-one hundred weight,
 Yet a wheelwright, James Dwight,
 (For I've got his name right,)
 Rang her six-and-a-half hours
 In that very tower.

Yet Haley and Cooter,
 Pettit and Booth—
 Hopkins and Horrex,
 Wood and Hayes,
 For that was the order they stood,—
 Nearly sixteen thousand changes they rung,
 Such manly deeds deserve to be sung,
 Much thanks to Matthew Wood.*

Harry Haley conductin',
 (A right well-pluck'd 'un)
 It took them nine hours,
 But such were their powers—

* Matthew A. Wood is steeple-keeper at the church of his patron saint, St. Matthew, Bethnal-Green.—He is one of the finest heavy bell ringers.

It was rung in the steeple of Bethnal Green,
Where Matt. Wood's hung it up to be clearly
seen.

The hand bells—the cup bells they'll play in like
manner,

As if they were handling a grand *pianner*.

Some bells they bring out are just like a saucer,
Such bells as we folk never saw, Sir.

If you ask for grandsire,

They'll readily answer—

“ If treble Bob Maximus

“ You’re axin’ us,

“ We’ll give you a bit of a touch.

“ We’ll give you, though late as

“ It is, Stedman Caters—

“ Bob Royal—Superlative—Court Bob, and

Cinques,

“ Unless any gentleman present thinks

“ He’s already had almost too much.”

Now though these men may,
At the end of the day,
Enjoy their yard of clay :
Though they have their beer,
I've but little fear
 That such clever men and true
Will make themselves beasts :—
They'll keep moderate feasts,
 And go home as all sober men do.

There's no man can ring
A single thing,
 Who's not sober and steady and straight ;
For drink shakes the nerve,
And in time they swerve,—
 He gets addled and dull in his pate.

Every ringer I've known worth his salt,
Minds how much, when, and where he swallows his malt :
 How little he took
 You could tell by his look,
For his head and his eye are clear.

While he's hunting and dodging, and snapping
and bobbing,

His wife or children he'll ne'er be robbing,
His home not sad with sobbing.

He strikes his bell nicely,

Behaves himself wisely,

Nor pays for his pleasure too dear.

As in treble Bob the slow bell

Lies long in one place :—

In the old place you may surely tell
You'll find his familiar face.

No rolling stone like the treble in grandsire,

He finds *that* would'nt justly answer.

He'll "dodge" with a tempter, but "make a place"

When he's got any danger to face.

Tho' he *snap* in the slow work,

He snaps none at home,

But is gentle, and loving, and kind;

Tho' misfortunes come thick,

And he go down quick—

He's soon on his legs, as you'll find.

And though, when he hunts, he “hits them as ‘its ‘im,’”
 Ne’er injures his fellow in life or in limb;

Like the *Bob*, he would change the course of those
 Who are rapidly running to ruin, he knows,
 And he makes a parting change with the man,
 Who’s always boozing over his can.

With God’s Word as his coursebell he soon comes to lead,
 And tho’ twelve times wrong,—till he’s twelve times right,
 He’ll battle, and strive, and fight.

Whatever be sent
 He’s always content,
 Be the method “even” or “odd;”
 He’ll dodge “the right”
 As long as he’s light,
 Till at length he lies under the sod.

Old Isaac, he’s mostly our treble man,
 He’s steady, and always strikes true:
 He often says he rings by a plan,
 But he can’t explain it to me or to you.

Yet he's never wrong—and he'll put *you* right,
Or any he meets in a similar plight.

And Alfred, our big tenor man,
(You know him, so gentle and kind,—
We met to ring for his wedding, you'll mind,)
They say he meets with more than a match
So soon as he lays his hand on his latch,
For he's wedded to saucy Fan.

His mates, wanting sometimes to slap hard,
Declare that she's heavily clapped.
Yet Alf. ne'er gives her too much rope,
And gently keeps her well in hand.

And rope-spinner George we mustn't forget,
He's a bit of a Bob-caller too ;
He'll spin a good rope, and he'll give us good yarns,
He's right fond of a bit of a joke.
At George and his yarns sly fun they may poke,
Yet you try and get as much as he earns,—
He's getting as rich as a Jew.

His ropes are the longest and best hemp that's grown,
They'll bear taking up,—and they'll bear taking down,—
 They're not too strong,—nor yet too light,—
They'll never slip wheel if you handle them right.
The sallys are firm—in length just a yard,—
They're soft as velvet, and not too hard ;
 And George he loves a bit of colour,
He says dirty sallys look much duller.

Our steeple keeper
Finds it cheaper
 To keep the bells in good trim :
If you'll find him in suet and oil,
 You're sure they'll never spoil,
 You're safe to depend on him.
Our ringing-loft is nicely kept,
For old Sam'l's the man to see it swept.

On the bells we'll allow no jangling,
'Mong our ringers we'll have no wrangling ;

Let a saucy lad but shew himself airs,
We'll very soon shew him downstairs.

We'll always give a young ringer a hand,
Tho' not good enough to make one of our band.

If a stranger comes up, whether ringer or no,
We'll make him feel easy at once, I know.

Some ringers will ask them the priece of a pot,
“It's fair,” so they say, “he should pay for his shot;”
But that's not our way. It's *that* which keeps down
The science of ringing in country and town.

Men think—“Here's a lot of drunken sots,
“Who think of nothing but 'bacca and pots;
“Neither me nor my sons shall be ringers,” they say
“Or we'll soon fall into some evil way.”

If a gentleman likes
To give us the price
 Of some beer or bacca, we don't say no;
But if any man *ask*,
We soon call him to task :
 We won't have it—it's always no go.

Mr. Wilson, the clerk, he says one day

(He's forester up at the Hall)—

“I’ve heard that without delay,

“Our young miss will be married and all.

“Now let’s muster strong and shew the old
Squire,

“We know how to ring a change and fire.

“Let’s shew we wish our young miss a good mate,

“She’s been kind to the poor man at the gate;

“She’s been kind to the ringers,

“And kind to the singers;

“Let’s ring all day,

“Yet not for the pay,

“Though the Squire he’s always free.

“It’s not the pay that makes us come,—

“We *couldn’t* let the bells be dumb;

“For the Squire we love,

“And his daughter we love—

“We would readily ring without fee.”

At the wedding was gathered a wondrous lot,

The ringers they were not forgot.

Old Isaac's rheumatics, and Sam'l's bad cough,
It's wondrous how soon they shook them off.

Mr. Wilson's axe lay quiet that day,—
And George spun no hempen yarns, I'll lay;

There was feasting for high and low.

Big Alf. was there with his his saucy Fan,
But that day her clapper was “tied;”
And therefore he felt like a different man,
For his temper was never once tried.

*

Boys! long ago was a victory won,
Folks rightly said “'twas nobly done,”

On the field of *Waterloo*:

When the news came home (I was but a boy),
We scarce could hold ourselves with joy!
Your grand-dad kept the steeple then,
Right soon he mustered all his men,
And far and wide
Long past eventide,
The joyous changes flew.

Tho' but a lad,
I knew to feel sad,
For the wounded and dying and dead,—
For the brave young boys who bled :
For the soldiers old,
Who with courage bold,
Nor thought of self, nor sighed,—
Rushed to the death, and died.

There's a greater victory won,
That Christ our Saviour's done,
And on next December twenty-five
(That's Christmas) if we're all alive,
We'll make the bells praise God.
For Christ has conquered death and hell—
Good Friday hears the Devil's knell.
For Christ declares in accents blest—
“O come, ye weary,
“No longer fear ye,
“And I will give you rest.”

At Christmas Christ came down, all meek and mild,
The Son of God—a humble, lowly Child.

To shew us how to live He came,
And how to bear with pain and shame,
And, when our end is nigh,
To shew us how to die.

To conquer the Devil—to bear our sins,
To lead us to heaven, He came to us.

O men! this is grander than *Waterloo*,—
Nobler than *Alma* and *Inkerman* too.

And on Easter morn the call-bell rings,
When the lark on high at heaven's gate sings.
Old Sam'l, he's up betimes that day—
He loves to see the bells in full play.
The gudgeons he'll grease—the sliders blacklead—
He'll see that all's straight overhead.

The mats for the ropes he carefully lays,
And the chime-hammers next he'll raise.

I heard it was a glorious “rise,”
A thing good ringers dearly prize.

Right well they rung to God's glory that day,
And why should they not? Christ rose to day.

Let old and young rejoice;
Not only with ropes and iron tongues,
But ringers must sing with lips and lungs,
And joy with heart and voice.

And when the peal's done (they'll not have it too
long)

They'll come down to join in the prayer and
song:

No shirking we'll have;—we've a rule, I say,
That he who rings must stay to pray.
If on the cymbals loud we praise,
In prayer and praise our voice we'll raise.

In the longest peals,
On the ear there steals,
The last Bob's sound,
And the bells come round.

Be ready, boys! ready, aye, ready!
The time will come,
When voice must be dumb,
And sight and ear pass away.
See in that day you've a good stout "stay."
Be ready, lads! ready, aye, ready!

At Sally and Backstroke knock 'em round,
Till men say such ringing never was found.
FIRE 'em, till every man's heart's in a glow,
For a far-off victory's won, let them know.

There's music in these tongues of iron,
The English heart can never tire on.
Their music sweet and wild,
Delights the little child.
The very kittens
Skip at the "Tittums."
To the wife there are scenes
Which the sound of the "Queen's"

Recalls with a glow of pleasure,
And Whittington's change,
When on Highgate they range,
Bids boys *his* example to treasure.

Long may the MUFFS lie in the box,
Safely under keys and locks,
And when with muffled boom,
We carry a brother to the tomb,
Sound the OPEN peal,
Our wound shall heal!
“Thy brother shall rise again.”

Long may the guild of ringers flourish!
And nought of dissention e'er nourish!
Let it never be said
That ringers
And singers
Never *did* agree—
Never *can* agree:
Put such a thing out of your head.

The bells are in tune,
And very soon
You'll have no discordant voice.

Men must give and take,
For comfort's sake,
Or will have to stop their noise.

As jangling bells make horrible din,
So to quarrel and fight is a shame and a sin.

Sure there's something noble in such an art—
Something that binds men, though far apart—
Something to warm man's heart to a glow,
When he hears the Christmas peal in the snow.
The sound calls up faces,
And well-known places,
When the wild midnight bells
Ring out farewells.

To the hoary old year they bid adieu—

“Old year, good night! and welcome! O
morrow!

“With thy measure of joy and sorrow”—
And gladly ring in the New.

Mates ! the grey old bell
A tale can tell
 Of joy—hope—fear—or sorrow.
Be ready, be strong ;
'Twill come, ere long,
 This tears—sorrow—joy of the morrow.

That's all !

STAND !







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